

Mercer Island Radio Operators (MIRO) Fact Sheet

Who We Are?

The Mercer Island Radio Operators (MIRO) is Mercer Island's team of volunteers (currently about two dozen active members) who provide auxiliary communications and technical support for our Police, Fire and other city departments in the event of natural or man-made emergencies when traditional communications modes and systems are not available.

Why It's Important?

The communications systems that everyone relies on, like the Internet, cellular and land-line telephones, and broadcast Radio and TV, are normally very robust, redundant, and reliable. Most disasters and events don't impact communications services and don't require our activation.

However, when a large disaster strikes, even the communications systems that our first responders use might be severely damaged or destroyed. MIRO members can step in to help keep lines of communication open.

What We Do and How Do We Do It?

When there's not a communications emergency, we practice the skills that we would use in the event of an emergency. We hold regular "on-air" radio networks to test both our skills and equipment. We regularly participate in regional and State-wide exercises with other official and volunteer teams.

In addition, we participate in various public service events, such as providing communications support for the Mercer Island Half Marathon, Summer Celebration and other City events.

Many of the MIRO volunteers are also members of other volunteer teams on Mercer Island. We bring our communications skills to those teams too.

Often, we're just "general volunteers" that our City calls on when they need extra help: such as staffing a "cooling shelter" during the recent heat episodes or distributing masks to the public. No radio communications skills were involved, just the willingness to answer the call to help when asked.

In summary, we're a volunteer team, operating under the authority, in support of our City.

We use amateur radio extensively, but we're **not** "a ham radio club." An amateur radio license is not a requirement for being part of MIRO, but it certainly helps.

What's Amateur Radio All About?

Amateur Radio (often called "ham" radio) is one of many types of radio services. Unlike commercial TV, AM or FM radio, ham radio can't engage in commercial activity – that's what makes us amateurs! Unlike the unlicensed, inexpensive, hand-held FRS radios that you can buy at a "big box" store or the CB radios that truckers use, the use of any ham radio requires a "knowledge-based" **license** from the FCC. The license enables hams to use a wide set of radio frequencies and higher operating power in order to be able to communicate both locally, regionally and even nationally to get emergency messages delivered to the right people.

Some people might consider the license requirement a barrier, but it's similar in concept to a driver's license – it helps to ensure that all hams operate in a safe, legal, and polite manner.

Want To Learn More?

If you're already a licensed ham radio operator and want to learn more about MIRO, see our website, <https://miro.cmivolunteers.org>, or contact Woody Howse, K7EDH, MIRO Volunteer Chairman, at 206-849-5370 or email at whowse@me.com.

If you don't already have a ham license, we can help you get started. Check out our website above and click on the "[Getting Started](#)" tab.

How To Help During an Emergency?

The best way to help yourself is to prepare yourself. The Mercer Island Emergency Management department has many resources on how to prepare yourself and your family. For example, have 7 to 14 days of food stored, including one gallon of water per person per day for every member of your household.

Consider joining one of the 13 volunteer teams that support the City of Mercer Island. Besides MIRO, there are the Administrative, Animal Shelter, Business Community, Childcare, Community Mental Health, Damage Assessment, Disaster Medical, Faith Community, Resources, Senior Care, Shelter, and Transportation teams. Whatever your skills and experience, there's a volunteer team that can use your help. Contact the Mercer Island Emergency Manager, MIPD Officer Jennifer Franklin, 206-275-7905, email jennifer.franklin@mercerisland.gov or visit: <https://www.mercerisland.gov/emergency-management/page/emergency-preparedness-volunteer-training>